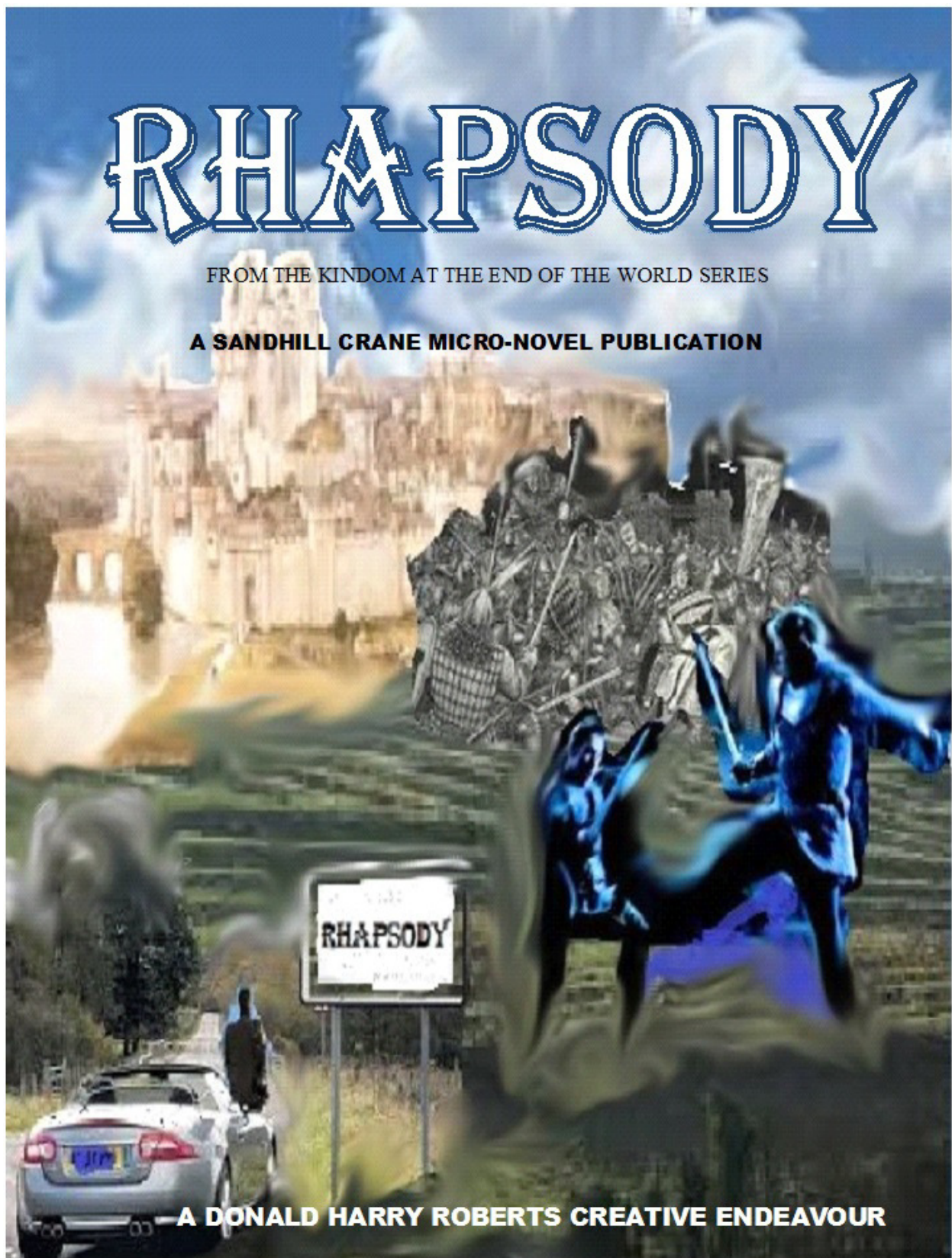


RHAPSODY

FROM THE KINDOM AT THE END OF THE WORLD SERIES

A SANDHILL CRANE MICRO-NOVEL PUBLICATION



A DONALD HARRY ROBERTS CREATIVE ENDEAVOUR

RHAPSODY
BOOK ONE OF THE
KINGDOM AT THE END OF THE WORLD SERIES
BY
DONALD HARRY ROBERTS

1

ONE DAY AN UNHAPPY MAN WENT FOR A DRIVE

He went for a drive. That's it. Just a drive. A drive with no destination and for no particular reason except to clear his head....get himself out of a melancholy mood...maybe even find a smile somewhere in the gloomy realities of his life. But the real questionthat he needed to answer was..."Why Am I Unhappy. I should be Happy. Most men with my life would be happy. But I am not. So again I ask why the hell am I so damn unhappy.

He went for a drive....just a little cruise in his convertible...with the top down and the wind blowing through his hair. But an hour became two three and finally four until he stopped at a line up for the ferry at Tobermory. A line he could not get out of. So he paid the fee and followed the lineup onto the boat.

"I should call home and let Ina know that I am still driving." He thought. But he didn't.

He had lunch on the ferry and ate like he was famished....which was exactly right because he had left home before breakfast, had missed supper the night before and only had a light lunch...so now he was having supper, breakfast and lunch all at once which he was just finishing when the ferry arrived at Southbay Mouth.

He returned to his car and followed the line of cars off the boat, stopping briefly to let the faster moving vehicles get ahead of him. He was not in a hurry and was not even sure where he was going...except he was on Manitoulin Island and at that moment it came as a great idea to explore this largest fresh water island in the world. So when all the traffic was gone he pulled back on to the road and started the next leg of his drive....still not quite happy but no longer severely unhappy..."Somewhere in between." He thought but had not found a smile in the still semi-dull reaches of his mood.

The road, highway 6. It travelled basically north. The unhappy, but not quite so unhappy man followed it for a short distance then stopped at a gas station...for gas...of course but he also purchased a map of the island at six dollars and ninety nine cents ...plus tax...a map he would only use once...minutes after he bought it.

The highway....number six made its way to Little Current then after a brief sojourn through town turned into highway five forty that etched its way along the north shore of the island and eventually curving and headed for the town of Meldrum Bay. It was mid-afternoon when he set off again and the not quite so unhappy man did not stop again until he came to the turn off to the town of Gore Bay. It was nearly dinner time, but after he

gassed up again decided to continue on to the end of the road. It would be approaching evening by the time he arrived....a good time to have supper. By the time he finished supper it would be too late to head for home. He would get a room....Certainly there would be a room to be had.....and on he went. However things did not go exactly as he planned....actually things went totally awry from the plan....as you will see...or should I say....as you will read.

2

It was September. To be exact. The last day of summer. The entire population of Rhapsody Bay was in the midst of their annual festival held every year for two days...whatever days they fell on, which in this case was on Wednesday and Thursday. People from all over the Kingdom of Rhapsody had come to help celebrate this very special event. It was the beginning of harvest and the first festival of two for that time of year. The second would be held on All Hallows Eve....the end of the harvest season.

At noon the King and Queen of Rhapsody climbed arm and arm the platform of the festival podium. There would be no speech, just a revelry of trumpets followed by the King and Queen announcing....in very loud voices. "Let The Festival Begin and may you all find joy."

That was it. Then came the speech....from the Mayor of Rhapsody Bay.....a speech he, Thoroughgood Maganstone new well to keep short and to the point....which he did and there is

no earthly reason to repeat it here since most of us know what mayors say at times like this and Thoroughgood said nothing moreor less than expected. At the end of his speech the trumpets sounded again and the festival was officially under way or as the locals put it....Rhapsody Arises.

Among all the celebrators there was one who was not in the correct mood for celebrating. In fact he was in a very dark mood because he knew something about the festival that no one else seemed to connect with....not even the King and Queen. His dark mood was caused by foreboding that hung in his mind....and heart as glum and dark as his mood for he had seen a cloud as dark as nightas big as the sky...rolling in from slightly east of south....a cloud with in which lived a face....the face of evil....an evil which he knew would come someday....and now was the day. The Kingdom of Rhapsody, so long a haven from that evil had been discovered and none could know if the Kingdom would....or even could survive the return of that ancient evil.

Alas who could he tell that would believe a fool such as he, a mere jester by sight and reputation but in truth a watcher and spy....watching for the evil....spying on the evil and the minions that came ever and anon to wreak havoc where ever they could. Yes just a fool of a jester on the surface but the appointed guardian.

It frightened the Jester, and Jester was his name for people named him by what they saw him to be,....it frightened him that he may have to stand alone against the evil until others realized

the evil had returned...if he could stand long enough for that to happen.

Nonetheless...no matter what needed to be done he would do it, even reveal his true self if necessary, not a fool nor a jester, but wizard with a name all in the other world knew and had known since the last days of the king of the round table.

3

The unhappy man...growing less unhappy with each passing mile and cluster of thoughts came to the big bend in highway 540 that turned left coursing south. A mind's view of the map showed him that all was well and the road would soon turn west again. And indeed it was not long before he slowed to pass through the hamlet of Evansville. He found it curious that people in their yards gardening, fixing things or just watching waved at him.....a stranger. For a second....and only a second the unhappy man found a faint smile...his lips barely twitching but a smile nonetheless and it made him the slightest bit less unhappy. But it faded when it came to mind when he saw a telephone booth that he should call home. Surely his wife and two kids would be wondering where he was....why he had been gone so long and for that matter....why he was gone at all. Once again he slipped into a more unhappy state and wished he could push the thoughts of home out of his mind.

But that only served to pose the question of why he was unhappy. After all he had it all, a nice home with a small mortgage, a beautiful mostly loving wife...(nothing is ever

perfect).....two fairly well adjusted kids, a boy and a girl...twins no less.....a great job....yes great was the word...he was having a great life....with no reason to be unhappy....but he was. There was also that ever present sense of foreboding, or was it a sense of doom...a dark feeling that no matter how bright life seemed to be something.....something.....something sinister lurked in the corner of his mind.....like an unreachable memory...or was it....yes maybe.....a Deja-vu...something he had done before or at least witnessed.

The highway continued on, now dominantly west. Funny thing however. Though he had been travelling for some time and felt the sun should be high in the sky it was still like a mid-morning sun or maybe just a little later...not much....but time was a funny thing anyway and....as he had noticed...the island itself had its own twists and turns in time not ancient but not modern....stuck one might say....in places....in the fifties....yet here and there wind miles rising over the land like a sur-real future.

Then...in a blink....as though he had been teleported forward he was slowing into another town....small and quaint like most on the island. Silver Water.

Still it seemed the road west to Meldrum Bay grew longer instead of shorter and the unhappy man wondered if he should ever get there....even though the sun seemed not to have risen much further in the sky, stuck....like the island in a little bubble of time. Funny how the mind perceives things sometimes he thought when suddenly he was coming upon a sign indicating a turn to the Whitesea Resort, not far from Meldrum bay.

As he passed the sign a thick grey-blue fog gathered around the convertibleas suddenly as the time it took to read this sentence.

4

Gwen Ivers selected a large potatoe from a vegetable vendor, studied it then regarded the farmer who had grown the potatoe. How have you grown such large potatoes?" She asked.

The farmer regarding the cook servant, by her clothing and nature...and of course lower speech with a curious grin. "Would you tell your Lords gardener my secret if I told you?"

"Maybe, but I doubt the Lords gardener could use it since all his skills are focused on growing the most gorgeous of roses which as you probably know win the best rose completion most years." Answered Gwen Ivers.

"Ah well. Maybe it is so but I will keep my secret anyhow Ma'am." A secret that would have revealed that he was but the vendor and his brother being the grower but decided there was no need to ruin his moment to bask in the compliment. He also had another secret...but of that we will reveal sometime further along in the story. I shall reveal now however that the vendor's brother's own secret was a darker shade of grey than most people would like to know about. For the Potatoe grower was indeed a darker character than even his bother knew.

Meanwhile a little further on Gwen came upon Jester who was wearing a tight fitting hood with one curving orange ear and one curving red ear and a suite made of corn husks over cotton undergarments and boots with bells sewn to the ankles.

He said to her. “Do you know the time is coming when that which once was will come again with hopes that this time there will be a victor and the wonders and glories of the round table will rise once again in the world.”

“Dear Jester why ever are you prattling out such gloom and doom. Is it not your place to make us laugh...especially on these festive occasions?” Gwen Ivers giggled. “And if such gloom and doom is upon us should you not be warning the King.?”

“No. I am warning who is rightly to be warned because you are a part of that which created this gloom and doom...though only one half for another brings another darkness and he that was your consort in the here-ever past may not come to mend what is broken.”

“Riddles....Riddles....Of course. Riddles by the Jester.” Gwen Ivers laughed aloud then sped off on her quest.

Jester frowned. His task would be a terrific undertaking. No one living remembered. How could they. As similar as each was...well....he would have to attempt another tact since the direct and obvious one was too far beyond the vision of any Rhapsodian.

“Maybe I could convince the Lady of the Lake that something horrendous is looming down upon Rhapsody. I must hurry.

Time is running out. The Rhapsody is nigh at hand and when it comes this place will be unprotected save the likes of me...or....dare I hope that the lost knight should return in this our very hour of need.”

5

I got it. The story is five chapters on and you still don't have a name to fix to the unhappy man exceptthe unhappy man. Well....I suppose I could tell you his name but that would ruin the story with too much information. So for now I will keep you wondering and just say that the blue/grey fog thickened....so much so that the unhappy man could only move his car along at a walking pace with the driver's door open and following the centre line. But even at that he made head way and at last came out of the fog where..... much to his surprise there was a sign.....a sign that should have read “WELCOME TO MELDRUM BAY, but it did not....not even remotely....instead what it said was. YOU ARE ENTERING RHAPSODY. And just at that same moment his car sputtered and quit and, even after several attempts it would not start again.

“Great.” The unhappy man got unhappier again as he climbed out of the car and look about. “I didn't see any place called Rhapsody on the map. I'll look.” But when he looked for the map it was nowhere to be found. “Hmmmm must have blown out somewhere.” He pondered.

With limited choices the unhappy man retrieved his travelling bag....a backpack.... and set off on foot toward what he figured

must be Meldrum Bay. Butapparently he would go through Rhapsody first. Maybe they have a mechanic there that can pick up my car and fix it, but even as he spoke his gaze was met with something alerting.

Oh my. A carriage and horses. This must be Menonite country. How quaint.....but....oh what is this I see coming...Damn....a knight in blue armour.....and....what in tarnation is that.” His eyes were filled with the likes of a beast he had only read about in fantasy tales. “A dragon? Can’t be possible. I must be hallucinating. Maybe I....”

“Well Hello.” Said the man driving the carriage who was immediately joined by the knight upon his silver steed and the dragon whose scales were emerald and gold. “Are you going to attend the festival” asked the man driving the carriage.

“I am on a drive in my car on my way to Meldrum Bay.” The unhappy man replied with a glance over his shoulder but saw that his convertible was nowhere to be seen. He started but got a grip on his surprise quickly. “Well I am on my way to Meldrum Bay.” He made every effort to hide his alarm....and successfully too I must say....though inwardly his gut was in a knot and his mind was in a tangent upheaval.

“Never heard of that place but we are all going to Rhapsody Bay, Capital Town of The Kingdom Of Rhapsody to join in the festival. I understand it is going to be something spectacular this year....especially since we have had a great harvest so early in the year. Come up and ride with me.”

The unhappy man glanced at the carriage. “Who is inside?”

“My Lord and My Lady is all you need to know. Take the ride and be content.” Replied the driver.

6

The unhappy man climbed aboard and took his place beside the driver who smelled of lavender and brandy.....a strange combination to be sure but somehow it seemed fitting, considering the circumstances of the situation. And a situation it was indeed because it met none of the criteria supporting reality. Still...with a pinch the pain was real enough and the smell of the horses, four beautiful draft horses with golden brown shoulders and flanks and manes and hooves as white as alpine snow. And the sun.....curiously now rose toward noon instead of the eve and the full moon rising. Yes a full moon was creeping over the horizon. The unhappy man wondered if that was normal, but then what the hell was normal in his twisted situation.

The carriage moved forward and the shoed clip-clop of horse hooves clattered on the cobble stone road. Only a short way on, a mile or so, rising out of the grand and very old oak, maple and elm trees came a spire, glittering gold in the nearly noon day sun with a flag at its point, a red dragon against a white field.

Then as the trees gave way to a town...well...almost a city....a palace grew under the spire and crowds of people lined the street leading to the palace which was on the left side and on the right the wharf with countless, magnificent tall ships of every kind the unhappy man had ever seen in pictures and paintings.

And atop the battlements of the palace, for the palace was in-fact a fortress as much as a palace, came trumpeters and their trumpet calling out a herald announce the arrival of the carriage. And the unhappy man, now almost not unhappy surmised that the passengers in the carriage...the Lord and Lady.... must be a King and Queen.

The carriage stopped and the driver said, "Here you must get off." Leaving no room for argument...so the almost happy man climbed to the street and watched as the carriage rolled away along the street then disappeared through the gates of the palace.....fortress.

He turned and asked a near-by onlooker. Was that the carriage of the King and Queen?" just to confirm his conclusions. The onlooker answered..."Well yes...it was the Royal carriage and it is likely their majesties were inside since it is after all their carriage."

"Indeed." The unhappy man replied, sneering at the onlooker's tone, which suggested a sarcasm insinuating stupidity.

Deciding not to pursue an argument the not quite unhappy man began a wandering way up and down the streets, cutting through alleyways, strolling along bits and starts of the wharf and at last coming to an arena, vacant at the moment but signs of an old English nature announcing a tournament of jousts in the late afternoon. The Tournament Of Vengeance, it was called where knights fighting in the stead of the real combatants fought for their charges honour.

“But who?” The unhappy man pondered and went to find an answer to his query.

7

In a few minutes he found a Squire, apprentice to a knight and asked his question. To which the squire responded. “Tis a fight to the death, jousting, swords and daggers if necessary The king must fight his kin.....a son and a once loyal knight who stole away with the king’s bride....or should I say the knight and the Queen had an illicit tryste of passion and love that angered the king....and the son...well that is a horror story in itself for the son is a bastard boy born to the sister of the King whom had moment of passion together in the autumn of the year neath the full moon.....though they knew not that they were brother and sister for they both wore masks.”

“Sounds like a movie I saw once.” replied the almost unhappy and now considerably curious man. “A movie Sire?” The squire replied with equal curiosity.

“Never mind. You could never understand, any more than I can understand how I have come to this absurd, archaic place.”

The squire did not pursue the conversation but turned away and vanished into the shadows of a livery...and the unhappy man continued on his expedition along the medieval passageways of Rhapsody Bay....thinking...Rhapsody....”An effusively enthusiastic or ecstatic expression of feeling and or would it be or...and/or...I suppose.... An epic Grecian poem...or in this

case an absurd hallucination or malady of the mind brought on by what, a concussion, a fever. But I do not recall being victim to either....hmmmmmm.”

He turned a corner and what....there stood a jester...well the Jester named...Jester, who I have spoken of before. And Jester stared at the unhappy...but almost happy man with wide curious eyes. After a moment he said...”You are not Rhapsodian I can see in your eyes...so it must be you are from somewhere else and I must ask where that might be. I must know this because a great battle is about to be fought upon Camlann and it must not be interfered with for I am in hopes that this time history maybe be changed and....”

“Do you have any idea how absurd this whole thing is.” The unhappy man interjected over a chuckle.

“Absurd....Hardly...I is you who would be absurd since you are a stranger and as I said...not of Rhapsody.” Replied Jester.

“But how could a Jester know of this?” the unhappy man challenged.

“Because I am no mere jester interloper. I am a wizard!” Jester flayed his arms in a dramatic swirl discarding his costume in a flash of smoking light and appeared from the flare a wizard’s robe. “I am...”

With a start and a jump back the unhappy man cried out....Merlin The Magician.....This gets more and more absurd with each breath I take.”

For a long moment the two stood motionless staring at one another, one bordering on menace and the other on discombobulation. Only when trumpets sounded did they break and both looked to the battlements of the palace/fortress.

“Camelot.” Blurted the horrifically stupefied unhappy man.

“The Saxons come...the knights are gathering. I must go and join the battle and hope.....” Said Merlin distantly.

As the magician strode away the unhappy but curious man said after him...”.But history cannot be changed....it should not be changed for all after it will change....but alas this is but an absurd dream...derived from an history that is but a myth.....or legend at best.....Is it not?”

8

Thousands of spectators gathered at the edges of the battle field.....wait.....something happen before that that complete slipped my mind. A tarty-ish thing I think but not an uncommon thing for the lady involved...in fact it caused a terrible rift between two dear friends....a long time ago...that I do not know was ever resolved....completely....

The unhappy man decided upon a drink.....an ale....so he stopped in at a pub where he met a woman I alluded to earlier in this tale. Her name...Gwen Ivers....a pretty lass with a pretty sway and slender form and an open mind. And when the unhappy man met her gaze he was....well....how can it be

put....smitten....yes...uncontrollably smitten and when she smiled he was inescapably captured.

The ale became wine and the conversation became....hmmmm....it became warm....then impassioned then down right broiling and the two, wine induced slipped away to a private place and...well you know.....got intimate. But only after the passion eased and the lady departed did the unhappy man catch on...Gwen

Ivers....Gwenivers...Gwenevere....Guinevere...."Oh My!...King Arthur....Sir Lancelot and now....now....oh...now me....how could it be....how much more absurdity can this place rise or should I say fall too."

Now....hours later.... Thousands of spectators gathered at the edges of the battle field. On a hill...inland, King Arthur and his Knights with Lancelot upon one side and Merlin the Magician on the other watched and waited. On another hill...sea side the horde of Saxons lead by the King's Son Mordred rose viciously over the hill's crest making battle cries to curdle the blood of the bravest warrior.

Then for the longest of intensified moments....one of those for-
evers that when done seemed to have flashed by.....a deadly
quite and deathly stillness set upon Camlann....so deep one
could almost hear the grim-reaper laughing in delight at the
horde of dead that was soon to be his to guide
too....where...where do such warriors go upon death?

Then...with a rush of motion and dries of battle the charge began. I cannot here describe the horrors of a battle fought with

sword and axes, pikes and mace....combat at the closest quarters with no mercy afford.

But this battle was ne'er more than a back ground to the one all who were watching were awaiting. And it arose out of the screams and rants when King Arthur met in horrifying battle with Mordred....and among the spectators watched Guinevere, and Morgaine LeFey and even she that was The Lady Of The Lake, Vivaine.

And the unhappy man stood watching....horrified...mesmerized and dashed twice and thrice with the raging absurdity that unfolded before his eyes. He wanted to turn away from the rivers of red, the violence such as none he had ever imagined, but he was compelled by some unknown force to witness the re-enactment of battle fought so long ago that all who watched desired would arise contrary to history.

The unhappy man himself felt his heart banging like a march drum in his chest and fighting to stop his own cheers in support of the King. But he held back his voice and turned an eye to see the horde of Saxons slaughtering the last of the Knights of the round table. Lancelot lay dead, Merlin had crawled to the arms of Vivaine and Morgaine LeFey fell upon her knees and wept, for Camelot, her Brother and her son and for Avalon.....

“Rhapsody.... an effusively enthusiastic or ecstatic expression of feeling.

Rhapsodies of praise.... and in ancient Greece an epic poem, or part of it.” The unhappy man mused as he gazed upon the body strewn expanse of Camlann and marvelled at the victors who stood not raging in victory but squatting and hulking in one place and another themselves nearly wiped out. And there death to death, wrapped in each other’s arms were the king and the son....and nothing in history had changed and never would.....if this was history....

Circling above was the dragon he had seen when first he came to Rhapsody. Circling like a vulture.

The unhappy man shook his head and turned away but as he did a sun so brilliant it was blinding broke through the gloom of the day and shared the sky with the full moon. He stopped in that second and turn back toward the battle field and watched in utter amazement as the horror faded away until nothing was left to see but the beauty of the field rising into the sky....like nothing at all had happened.....and Rhapsody Bay was peaceful going about its existence like any other medieval town. And the unhappy man felt within him a weariness as he had never known before....and he laid upon the lush green grass of the meadow with his arms folded behind his head and his eyes fixed on the sun and moon as the moon began crossing over the sun edging into an eclipse.....And then there was darkness...a darkness of the mind for how long....the unhappy man knew not.....but when his eyes opened again and he rose into consciousness he was standing by the sign the read RHAPSODY and there was the carriage, the knight upon his steed and a dragon circling and scorching the sky with a brilliant red and yellow flame.....again.

“And now the absurdity grows broader and starts all over again.....but how am I here...what event has led me to this unexplainable circumstance?” He spoke aloud.....immediately interrupted by the driver of the carriage beckoning him to climb upon the seat beside him.

The unhappy man tried to ignore the driver and return through the mist back...he ...thought to his car. But upon emerging from the mist there awaited the carriage. “Well now.....I suppose my choices have been reduced to one.” He spoke as he climbed aboard the carriage.

“Back again are ya.” Said the driver....Got all wrong the first time.” He added over a chuckle.” Well maybe you will get it right the next time. Its all up to you....the more you do nothing the more everything stays the same.”

The unhappy man pondered the driver’s words as they moved off then in a thoughtful tone said...”But who am I to change the world?

“Who are you to sit idle and not changed the world?” replied the driver who turned his gaze on the unhappy man who saw that he was looking into his own eyes though the face was dissimilar in that it was.....ancient....

Constable Ellis Macvern eased the breaks on, hardly able to believe what he was looking at. There.....stopped in the middle of the road, straddling the white line was a grey convertible, the

engine running, the lights on and....most curious.....driver-less and no one in sight in any direction. He parked a few feet behind the convertible and made a brief circular inspection of the scene then returned to his patrol car and called the incident in.

A minute later, executing a closer examination he found a map of the island open.....in the ditch but left it lay where it was. Then he began searching further afield for any indication that the driver of the car had wandered into the bush....but found nothing within a few of the road side....but then he was not a tracker.

“Well. This is.....” A mist rose before him. “This is what.....?”

And here I must conclude the story because I have no knowledge what came next.

Oh my....It has completely slipped my mind. I did not tell you the name of the unhappy man. But now that I am here at the end of the story I ask you....does it matter....does it really have any impact on the storyafter all....you have one already....after a loose abstract, absurd fashion. But things are just that in THE KINGDOM AT THE END OF THE WORLD.

TTFN

